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Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 HA-05
CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11 AID-05
IO-13 /087 R

DRAFTED BY ARA/ECA:RCGRAHAM:AF
APPROVED BY D:WARREN CHRISTOPHER
ARA/ECA:RWZIMMERMANN
ARA:GLISTER (INFO)
HA:RCOHEN (INFO)
ARA:FMCNEIL
A/PPC:DIETRICH
USOAS:ITRAGEN (INFO)
S/S-O:WFROPE
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P 270027Z MAY 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 135542

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PINT, PA

SUBJECT: ACTING SECRETARY MEETING WITH PARAGUAYAN
OPPOSITION LEADERS.

REF: ASUNCION 1833

1. ACTING SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER MET ON MAY 24 WITH CARMEN LARA CASTRO AND DOMINGO LAINO. ALSO PRESENT IN THE MEETING WERE SPECIAL ASSISTANT STEPHEN OXMAN, INTERPRETER STEPHANIE VAN REIGERSBERG, AND DESK OFFICER RICHARD GRAHAM, NOTETAKER. MR. CHRISTOPHER NOTED THAT HUMAN RIGHTS HAS HELD A HIGH PRIORITY THROUGHOUT THE SEVENTEEN
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MONTHS OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION, AND CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS HAS BEEN EVIDENT IN MANY OF OUR POLICY DECISIONS. HE ASKED FOR THEIR APPRAISAL OF THE SITUATION IN PARAGUAY AND AN EVALUATION OF THE FEBRUARY NATIONAL ELECTIONS.

2. LARA CASTRO RESPONDED THAT THE VISITORS WERE GRATEFUL

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FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSMIT THEIR CONCERNS. THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THE USG HAD INVITED PARAGUAYAN OPPOSITION LEADERS TO DISCUSS THE REALITIES IN HER COUNTRY. SHE FELT THAT THIS WAS A PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE MOMENT TO DISCUSS U.S. POLICY VIS A VIS PARAGUAY. MR. CHRISTOPHER OBSERVED THAT IT IS HIS POLICY TO RECEIVE OPPOSITION LEADERS, OUT OF RESPECT FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, AND SUCH MEETINGS WERE NOT INTENDED TO DENIGRATE EXISTING GOVERNMENTS. LARA CASTRO INDICATED THAT THESE GROUND RULES WERE UNDERSTOOD.

3. LAINO MADE THREE POINTS IN HIS INITIAL STATEMENT: 1) HE REQUESTED THAT AN ACCOUNT OF THE MEETING BE MADE PUBLIC; 2) HE RESPONDED TO THE QUESTION ABOUT THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS WITH THE STATEMENT THAT IT WAS A SHAM AND THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY IS WORSE OFF NOW THAN BEFORE THE ELECTION; AND 3) HE ADVISED THAT THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE TALKING AGAIN ABOUT A UNITY MOVEMENT. LAINO ADDED THAT THE OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE BEEN GIVEN ENCOURAGEMENT BY RECENT U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIONS. SPECIFICALLY, THE U.S. VOTES AGAINST IFI LOANS HAVE MADE A STRONG IMPACT IN PARAGUAY. ALTHOUGH NOTING THAT HIS COMMENTS ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION WERE NEGATIVE, LAINO STATED THAT, IN FACT, THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION HAD IMPROVED. HE MENTIONED THE PARTIAL LIFTING OF THE STATE OF SIEGE AND THE FURTHER RELEASE OF PRISONERS AS EXAMPLES OF THE IMPROVE-
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MENT.

4. LARA CASTRO COMMENTED THAT THE LIFTING OF THE STATE OF SIEGE HAD BEEN DONE ONLY TO IMPROVE PARAGUAY'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE IN ORDER TO CONTINUE TO RECEIVE ECONOMIC AID. IRRESPECTIVE OF THIS ACTION, SHE STATED THAT THE ENTIRE COUNTRY HAD BEEN EFFECTIVELY UNDER A STATE OF SIEGE FOR YEARS. LAWS WERE NOT RESPECTED. THE NATIONAL ELECTION WAS SHAMEFUL. THOSE ELECTED WERE HANDPICKED BY THE GOP. AFTER YEARS OF WORK ON HUMAN RIGHTS, LARA CASTRO STATED THAT SHE UNDERSTOOD CLEARLY THE PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND THE RECENT IMPROVEMENTS - THE GOP IS PREPARING FOR THE OASGA.

5. MR. CHRISTOPHER RESPONDED TO THE FIRST REQUEST BY LAINO BY OBSERVING THAT HIS SCHEDULE IS PUBLIC. HE INDICATED THAT THE DEPARTMENT WOULD MAKE A STATEMENT THAT THE MEETING HAD TAKEN PLACE AND THERE HAD BEEN AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. CHRISTOPHER ADDED THAT HE PREFERRED THAT SPECIFICS OF THE CONVERSATION BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL IN CONFORMITY WITH STANDARD DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE. LARA CASTRO AND LAINO INDICATED THAT THIS WAS AGREEABLE TO THEM. THE ACTING SECRETARY THEN NOTED THAT WE HAVE TRIED

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TO USE OUR VOTES IN THE IFIS TO BRING ABOUT IMPROVEMENTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS. HE SAID GOVERNMENTS MAY IMPROVE THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS AND THAT WE DO NOT SEEK TO TAKE CREDIT FOR IMPROVEMENTS OR TO CLAIM A ONE-TO-ONE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WHAT WE DO AND WHAT THEY DO.

HE CONCLUDED
BY COMMENDING BOTH VISITORS FOR THEIR COURAGEOUS ACTIONS IN DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND EXPRESSED SYMPATHY FOR THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES MEMBERS OF LARA CASTRO'S FAMILY HAD SUFFERED.

6. LAINO MET SEPARATELY WITH USOAS DEPUTY PERMANENT
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REPRESENTATIVE TRAGEN ON MAY 23 AND WILL MEET WITH ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR VALDEZ ON MAY 25. BOTH LAINO AND LARA CASTRO HELD ADDITIONAL MEETINGS IN THE DEPARTMENT ON MAY 24 WITH ARA/ECA DIRECTOR ZIMMERMANN, GEORGE LISTER, ROBERTA COHEN OF HA, STEVE OXMAN FROM MR. CHRISTOPHER'S OFFICE, AND DESK OFFICER GRAHAM.

7. IN THE MEETINGS THE VISITORS WERE ASKED WHAT THE EFFECT OF AN IAHRC VISIT TO PARAGUAY WOULD BE. LARA CASTRO REPLIED THAT DEALINGS WITH THE GOP CANNOT BE BASED ON THE INTEGRITY OF PROMISES MADE BY THAT GOVERNMENT. SHE WAS CONCERNED THAT THE IAHRC MAY GO DOWN AND SIMPLY CREDIT INFORMATION GIVEN IT BY THE GOP. SHE HAD READ THE SPECIAL IAHRC REPORT ON PARAGUAY AND FOUND MANY FACTUAL ERRORS, E.G. PERSONS LISTED AS DETAINED WHO ARE NOT. THUS, THE REPORT AS WRITTEN COULD BE REFUTED BY THE GOP ON GROUNDS OF INACCURACIES. TO PREVENT THIS, SHE HAD BROUGHT INFORMATION TO CORRECT ERRORS IN THE REPORT AND IMPROVE ITS CREDIBILITY. LAINO ADDED HIS THOUGHT THAT, ASIDE FROM OPERATIONAL QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE ACCURACY OF THE PRESENT REPORT AND INDEPENDENT ACCESS TO INFORMATION, IN GENERAL A VISIT BY THE IAHRC WOULD INDEED BE IMPORTANT.

8. THE FOLLOWING PRESS GUIDANCE WAS PREPARED FOR THE MAY 24 NOON BRIEFING:

"Q: WHY IS DEPUTY SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER MEETING WITH THE PARAGUAYAN OPPOSITION LEADERS LAINO AND LARA CASTRO?

A: IT IS OUR POLICY TO EXCHANGE VIEWS WITH A BROAD RANGE OF POLITICAL LEADERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE CONCERNED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS IN THEIR COUNTRY.
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Q: DID THEY REQUEST THE MEETING HERE IN THE DEPARTMENT?

A: THE MEETING WAS SUGGESTED BY VARIOUS PEOPLE INTERESTED IN U.S.-PARAGUAY RELATIONS, BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE U.S. GOVERNMENT." VANCE

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